

# **MARSOC: A WAY AHEAD**

**A Monograph  
by  
Major Todd P. Simmons  
United States Marine Corps**



**School of Advanced Military Studies  
United States Army Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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## **MONOGRAPH APPROVAL**

Major Todd P. Simmons

Title of Monograph: MARSOC: A Way Ahead

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jeffery A. Bowden, COL, USMC

Monograph Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Kevin C.M. Benson, COL, AR

Director,  
School of Advanced  
Military Studies

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

Director,  
Graduate Degree  
Programs

## **Abstract**

MARSOC: A Way Ahead by Major Todd P. Simmons, USMC, 57 pages.

The Global War on Terror and the Department of Defense have thrust change upon the Marine Corps and the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). Because the Secretary of Defense mandated that the Marine Corps would create a component in USSOCOM, the window for revolutionary change is open. USSOCOM needs a force with the capabilities of the Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU (SOC)). When the United States Marine Corps joins USSOCOM, it should not create a force that duplicates what already exists within that organization and is anathema to the Marine's organizational culture. If the Marine Corps must provide a component to USSOCOM then it should provide a capability that is distinctly, "Marine." The Marine Corps should offer, and USSOCOM should accept placement of all MEU (SOC)'s under the combatant command authority of USSOCOM. In the current war, the MEU (SOC) is the ideal force to provide the power, resilience, and ensure the unity of command for the special operations commander of all forces involved in a special operation.

Additionally the Marine Corps Special Operations Command should have the typical service responsibilities of training and equipping forces, but it should also have an operational responsibility of forming the core of a Joint Task Force for service in "small wars." These changes can create more capability for USSOCOM and place the Marine Corps in the forefront of the Global War on Terror.

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# **CHAPTER ONE: THE MARINES AND USSOCOM**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this monograph is to recommend a course of action for the United States Marine Corps' when it activates a component in the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). This question is relevant today because the Secretary of Defense determined that the Marine Corps would join USSOCOM in some capacity. As of this writing, the Marine Corps and USSOCOM are in negotiations over the details of this initiative. This monograph attempts to answer the question "what kind of participation?" It analyzes USSOCOM manning and operations in light of special operations history, theory and doctrine to determine what additional capabilities the Marine Corps could provide to USSOCOM to enhance its capability to fight the Global War on Terror (GWOT).

The methodology employed was research into the founding of USSOCOM and the Marine Corps' resistance to joining that organization. This was done to understand the cultural terrain that any course of action must take into account. Next, special operations doctrine was studied to determine how USSOCOM views itself as well as how it would view any Marine Corps contribution. The next step was to study the prevailing theory of special operations to understand why operations succeed or fail. William H. McRaven formulated this theory. He wrote that gaining relative superiority on an objective was the key to mission success. McRaven's theory is widely taught and is the backbone of much special operations doctrine and manning. The history of special operations in Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq were studied in light of theory and doctrine to determine why some were successful and others were not. This analysis revealed that the prevalent theoretical model and the USSOCOM force structure influenced by it are out of date. New principles were created to modernize McRaven's theory and make it useful in the GWOT. From these new principles, a Marine Corps contribution to USSOCOM was derived that is sound when tested by theory, doctrine, and history.

The monograph is organized into four chapters. Chapter 1 is a review and analysis of the factors that lead to the creation of USSOCOM, the reasons why the Marine Corps did not join the organization, and what has changed today to compel Marine participation. Chapter 2 is an analysis of current special operations doctrine and theory. In this chapter, new principles are proposed that modernize the prevailing theory to enhance its utility. Chapter 3 is an analysis of operations conducted by USSOCOM from Somalia to Iraq. This chapter demonstrates the need for the new principles and provides analysis that identifies gaps in USSOCOM's force structure. Chapter 4 explains how the Marine Corps can fill the force structure gaps and contribute to USSOCOM.

## **SNOWFLAKES**

The Department of Defense named the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) the “global synchronizer” for the Global War on Terror.<sup>1</sup> This makes USSOCOM the lead agent for war planning with responsibility for ensuring that worldwide operations against Al Qaida provide victory. The United States Marine Corps did not have a component in USSOCOM before 2005. That year, the Secretary of Defense directed Marine Corps leaders to study and decide on a force contribution. The Marine Corps must overcome its institutional resistance to joining that joint command and consider a serious contribution if it is to have a continuing impact in the GWOT.

The current Secretary of Defense forced the entire military, both uniformed and civilian to face the fact that change is painful, but change is inevitable. In the process, he challenged many long held beliefs and service specific programs.<sup>2</sup> In 2005, Secretary Rumsfeld demanded a

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Robinson, “Plan of Attack: The Pentagon has a secret new strategy for taking on terrorists-and taking them down.” *U. S. News & World Report*, 1 August 2005, 26-34.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Secretary Rumsfeld canceled funding for the Crusader artillery system over the objections of many in the US Army leadership and several members of Congress in order to invest funds in other programs. See Vernon Loeb, “Rumsfeld Untracks Crusader”, *The Washington Post*, 9 May 2002,



new relationship between the United States Marine Corps and the United States Special Operations Command. The Marine Corps did not join USSOCOM at its founding and resisted pressure to do so ever since. This was fine with some in the special operations community. In the 1980's, when the Marine Corps position "was briefed to a number of special operations forums around the beltway and at SOCOM, they were happy to have the Marine Corps assume a "back bench" role."<sup>3</sup> Because of Secretary Rumsfeld's decision, both the Marine Corps and USSOCOM must change their thinking as well as their organizations.

Secretary Rumsfeld's directive to the Marine Corps and USSOCOM came in the form of a "snow flake." Snowflakes are the current Washington term for a directive from the Secretary of Defense. Many open source publications like *Armed Forces Journal*, detailed its contents.<sup>4</sup> The essence of the directive was to compel the Marine Corps to provide a force contribution to USSOCOM, to compel USSOCOM to accept a Marine Corps contribution, and for the two organizations to cooperate on the details. In a separate, but equally significant directive, the Secretary of Defense determined that USSOCOM, a historically functional command, would gain warfighting responsibilities and serve as the global synchronizer for counter-terror operations. The combinations of these two directives have far-reaching effects on both the Marine Corps and USSOCOM. They could have equally broad effects on the successful prosecution of the GWOT. Both organizations should use the opportunity presented to fill gaps in USSOCOM's force structure rather than create new units that duplicate existing capabilities. The Marine Corps was directed join USSOCOM in some capacity. The question is, "what is the right capacity?"

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accessed online at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=&contentId=A53762-2002May8&notFound=true>.

<sup>3</sup> LtCol. Giles Kyser, *History (Supported by "Hard Data") as to why the Marine Corps did not participate in the standup of SOCOM*. Information Paper presented at Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 26 September 2002.

<sup>4</sup> John G. Roos, "2,500 Marines to SOCOM." *Armed Forces Journal International*, July 2005, 4.

## FOUNDING USSOCOM AND THE IMPACT OF MFP-11

The U. S. Congress created USSOCOM in 1986 by an act of legislation. The law was a direct result of perceived conflicts that arose between the services, disorganization, and neglect that lead to the “Desert One” disaster in Iran. Members of Congress decided that if the services could not fix special operations, then the legislative branch would fix it for them. The fix was the creation of separate unified command with the functional role of preparing and equipping the nation’s special operations forces for war.

Competent personnel served in special operations forces (SOF) before the advent of USSOCOM, but in the late 1970’s and 80’s American special operations were at a historical low point. While the people were capable, the units often had problems at the organizational level. This was a result of the services giving these units a low priority for funding and command attention. The failure of the hostage rescue mission in Iran highlighted these problems as no other event could have. When the commander of the mission aborted the operation, it was obvious that the special operations community was in trouble. The pictures of blackened and burned aircraft in the Iranian desert sent a signal to the world that American special operations were broken. The USSOCOM official history summarized the terrible period this way; “The event culminated a period of Special Operations Forces (SOF) decline in the 1970’s.”<sup>5</sup>

Former Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral James Holloway led an investigation into the causes for the mission’s failure. The *Holloway Report* as the investigation’s final product came to be called was an in depth assessment of the failure and a road map for SOF recovery in the future. The Holloway Report made the following recommendations:

“It is recommended that a Counter terrorist Joint Task Force (CJTF) be established as a field agency of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) with permanently assigned staff personnel and certain assigned forces.

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<sup>5</sup> United States Special Operations Command, *History* (MacDill AFB: USSOCOM-HO September 1998), 3.

It is recommended that the JCS give careful consideration to the establishment of a Special Operations Advisory Panel, comprised of a group of carefully selected high-ranking officers (active and retired) who have career backgrounds in special operations or who have served at the Commander in Chief (CINC) or JCS levels and who have maintained a current interest in special operations or defense policy matters.”<sup>6</sup>

The Department of Defense implemented the Holloway Panel’s recommendations in 1980. This was a step forward, but not far enough to prevent the next series of problems. SOF difficulties during the invasion of Grenada and the terrorist attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut Lebanon were the final catalysts that led to fundamental change. Senators William Cohen (R-ME) and Sam Nunn (D-GA) and Representative Dan Daniel (D-VA) introduced bills to their respective houses of Congress designed to change the way the services manned and controlled SOF. Senators Cohen and Nunn’s bill “called for a joint military organization for SOF and the establishment of an office in the Defense Department to ensure adequate funding and policy emphasis for low intensity conflict.”<sup>7</sup> Representative Daniel’s bill was even more radical. He argued for a separate agency headed by a civilian who would report directly to the Secretary of Defense.<sup>8</sup> Each house of Congress passed their respective bills and sent them to committee where a compromise was reached. The final bill, called the Cohen-Nunn Act, directed the President to create a four star unified command for all the service’s special operations forces. Additionally the new command had control of its own funding by creation of Major Force Program 11, known today as the “SOF checkbook.” The DOD activated USSOCOM on 16 April 1987. The legislation forced inter-service cooperation and placed control of resources in the hands of the special operations community, instead of their parent services.

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<sup>6</sup> William G. Boykin, *The Origin of the United States Special Operations Command* (Carlisle PA: USAWC), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## WHY THE MARINE CORPS DID NOT JOIN USSOCOM

While Congress was debated and created USSOCOM, then Commandant of the Marine Corps, General P. X. Kelley, argued that the Corps should not take part in the new organization. His rationale was that the Marine Corps was a general-purpose force with worldwide responsibilities. It did not maintain separate units to conduct special operations such as the Army's Special Forces. The Marine Corps did maintain units of selected individuals such as Force Reconnaissance Companies; however, those units worked directly for maneuver commanders. General Kelley believed that it would be a mistake to relinquish control of these or other similar units to USSOCOM because they had a supporting role in the Marines' traditional mission set.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the nature of the Marine Corps' mission did not allow the service to have a narrow focus on special operations.

General Kelley lobbied against the Marine Corps' inclusion in USSOCOM, but still he believed that the Marine Corps had something to offer in the realm of special operations. He tasked then Lieutenant General Al Gray, Commander of Fleet Marine Force Atlantic to expand the special operations capability within the Marine Corps.<sup>10</sup> The result of Gray's work was the very successful Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU (SOC)) program. Combatant commanders have employed MEU (SOC)'s with success from the rescue of downed Air Force pilot Scott O'Grady to the seizure of forward operating base Rhino in Afghanistan. While the MEU (SOC) program has been a tremendous tool for commanders, it has also been a catalyst for the spread of basic knowledge of special operations throughout the Marine Corps. MEU (SOC)'s can conduct special operations, but they are not SOF. They are not and have never been under the combatant command authority of USSOCOM.

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<sup>9</sup> LtCol Giles Kyser, "Fix Recon, USSOCOM, and the Future of the Corps: Food for Thought." *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 2003, 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

The root of General Kelley's resistance to USSOCOM was not mere service parochialism. At one point during the debate, Congressman Dan Daniel suggested to the Commandant that DOD should transfer all special operations forces to the Marine Corps. The Commandant argued against that idea also. The general view of the services at the time was that SOF was a burden due to financial neglect and narrow operational focus. It does not appear that senior leaders predicted the impact that MFP-11 would have on the capability of SOF or the community's potential. The other reason for General Kelley's dissent was duplication of effort. The initial directive from the Deputy Secretary of Defense called for no duplication. The army provided ground SOF, the navy provided maritime SOF, and the Air Force provided the aviators. The Commandant saw no avenue for Marine participation with existing units.<sup>11</sup>

General Kelley's arguments were convincing and the Marine Corps did not join USSOCOM. Headquarters Marine Corps has not provided units, but has and continues to provide Marines to the USSOCOM staff and to various joint theater special operations staffs. It does not maintain special operations forces, but it does maintain the capability and has regularly conducted special operations with the MEU (SOC) program.

## **CULTURE CLASH**

Another factor in the relationship of the Marine Corps and USSOCOM is the cultural differences between the two organizations. Carl Builder wrote on the subject of "service personalities," which is equivalent to the current phrase, "service cultures." Builder argued in the *Masks of War* that while "people outside the military institutions, including academics and presidents, may propose military strategies and concepts, these can be implemented only if and

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<sup>11</sup> LtCol Giles Kyser, *History (Supported by "Hard Data") as to why the Marine Corps did not participate in the standup of SOCOM*. Information Paper presented at Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 26 September 2002.

when military institutions accept and pursue them.”<sup>12</sup> While this may offend the idea of civilian control of the military, Builder establishes it as a fact. He argued that unless decision makers consider service personalities, the success or failure of an endeavor such as a force structure change is in doubt. Builder’s work establishes service culture as an important component in the determination of a Marine Corps contribution to USSOCOM.

Builder did not directly address USSOCOM and only made passing reference to the Marine Corps in his work. His focus was on the army, air force and navy and their impact on strategy formulation. He did not write much about the Marine Corps because he did not view it as an independent strategic actor, not because it did not have a service personality. When he did comment on the Marine Corps, Builder wrote that it had a “distinctive, even colorful” institutional personality.<sup>13</sup>

USSOCOM is not a separate service, but it does have a separate “personality.” The majority of the commanders have come from the special operations forces of the U. S. Army, but the command’s historical publications make it clear that there is a strong affinity with SOF from all the services. When the USSOCOM official history speaks of “we”, “us”, and “our” it refers to actions by Navy SEALs, Air Force Special Operations and the various Army SOF rather than along service lines. The second aspect of the USSOCOM culture is the divide between “black” and “white” special operations forces. The black SOF community is represented by classified special mission units that typically focus on direct action missions while white SOF is mainly associated with non-classified SOF units like the SEALs, and Army Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operations units. The commanders of USSOCOM have traditionally been

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<sup>12</sup> Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 9.

from “black” SOF backgrounds thus it is reasonable to infer that there may be a preference within the headquarters for those types of forces and missions.<sup>14</sup>

Members of USSOCOM are rightly proud of their elite status. A “SOF truth” is that “quality is better than quantity.” There is a need to screen and select members of its elite units to ensure they are up to mission requirements.<sup>15</sup> The Marine Corps is just as proud of its status as an elite organization. While it is larger than USSOCOM, it is the smallest service and is fiercely proud of its accomplishments. The Corps lays claim to an elite status because of the self-selection of its Marines based on a recruiting campaign that offers little other than the chance to be the “one of the few.”<sup>16</sup> One Marine summed up the visceral experience of being a Marine this way: “To the Marine, the Corps is his religion, his reason for being. He cannot be committed up to a point. For him, involvement is total. He savors the traditions of his Corps and doubts not the veracity of them. He believes implicitly that he must live up to those epics of physical and moral courage established by those who preceded him. He believes that the Corps is truly unique –that it is the most elite military organization ever devised and that he, as an integral part of that organization, must never bring disgrace or dishonor upon it.”<sup>17</sup>

This is a fair representation of what most Marines believe. Due to service rivalry, some may question if the Marine Corps in total is an elite organization. This paper did not settle that debate. For the purpose of this work, the entire Marine Corps is an elite organization. The Corps’ “service personality” reflects this and the broader American culture affirms this belief.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For biographies of past USSOCOM commanders, see United States Special Operations Command, *History* (MacDill AFB: USSOCOM-HO, 1998)

<sup>15</sup> United States Special Operations Command, *History*, 16.

<sup>16</sup> James D. Davis, *The Joint Expeditionary Culture Gap* (Fort Leavenworth KS: School of Advanced Military Studies), 31.

<sup>17</sup> Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1987), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Numerous sources are available on the topic of the Marine Corps as an elite organization, so the author will list only a few here. See Thomas E. Ricks, *Making the Corps* (New York: Scribner, 1997) Ricks reports extensively on Marine culture and makes positive comparisons with the German Army of World War Two as studied by Martin van Crevald, *Fighting Power German Military Performance, 1914-1945*; (Washington DC: Department of Defense, 1980); For a current perspective see James F. Dunigan, *The Perfect Soldier* (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp, 2004), pp 246, 290-292; To see how Marines

This discussion is necessary because one of the tenets of Marine culture is that there is “no elite within an elite.” The Marine Corps screens and selects certain individuals for special duty based on certain mission requirements such as reconnaissance, embassy duty, drill instructor, and others. However, the rest of the organization does not regard these duties as “special” or elite. The idea of a “special force” within the Corps is anathema to most assimilated into Marine culture. Marines that serve in special duty assignments are usually compelled to return to the regular Marine Corps in order to be competitive for promotion. This has the effect of not draining talented Marines from the infantry battalions, aviation squadrons and support groups by clustering them in small, specialized units for the duration of their careers. It also prevents developing highly skilled practitioners of special operations because it rewards the generalist rather than the specialist.

The inclusion of the Marine Corps in USSOCOM needs to address the different cultures that are involved. According to James O’Toole in *Leading Change*, “Effective change builds on the existing culture. A group will reject a foreign system of values the way a healthy body rejects a virus. Anthropologists know that culture change occurs in one of two basic ways. The first is revolutionary. This is always the course of disaster. Whether it is planned, Maoist-like Cultural Revolution or the unplanned collapse of a primitive culture that results from contact with the powerful technology, organization, and religions of the West, revolutionary change is always shocking, painful, disruptive, and undesirable.”<sup>19</sup> Decision makers need to consider these cultural factors with any course of action for Marine Corps participation in USSOCOM to succeed.

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view themselves, see Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984); For views from other services see comments of Sara Lister, former Assistant Secretary of the Army, who called Marines, “dangerous extremists.”; Ultimately, if one is uncertain about the “elite-ness” of the Marine Corps, he only need ask a Marine. The ferocity of the response will make evident the confidence of the Marine in his status as a member of an elite organization.

<sup>19</sup> James O’Toole, *Leading Change: The Argument for Values Based Leadership* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 73.



## THE GLOBAL SYNCHRONIZER

At its founding, the Joint Chiefs of Staff assigned USSOCOM the following mission:

“Prepare SOF to carry out assigned missions and if, directed by the President or the Secretary of Defense, to plan for and conduct special operations...Its specific responsibilities were to develop SOF doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures. Conduct specialized courses of instruction for all SOF. Train assigned forces and ensure interoperability of equipment and forces. Monitor the preparedness of SOF assigned to other commands. Monitor the promotions, assignments, retention, training, and professional development of all SOF personnel. Consolidate and submit program and budget proposals for Major Force Program 11. Develop and acquire special operations peculiar equipment, material, and services.”<sup>20</sup>

Subsequent administrations and commanders modified USSOCOM’s mission slightly, but the thrust of the task has remained the same since inception. The role of USSOCOM was to train and prepare forces for war, not to serve as war fighter unless specifically directed by the President and the Secretary of Defense. It was a functional command. The regional combatant commands (RCC’s), such as Central Command were the global war fighters. Typically, the RCC’s have received SOF from USSOCOM and then employed them through their own subordinate theater special operations commands.

Today that mission has changed in a significant way. While USSOCOM is still required to provide trained and ready forces for the RCC’s, it is also required to coordinate the global counter-terrorist campaign. The new mission statement reads, “USSOCOM leads, plans, synchronizes, and as directed, executes global operations against terrorist networks. USSOCOM trains, organizes, equips and deploys combat ready special operations forces to combatant commands.”<sup>21</sup> This is a dramatic change for the command. Previously some components of USSOCOM planned and commanded individual, national level special operations. Now because of the Department of Defense’s new instruction, the command must plan, synchronize and participate in the execution of a broad counter terror campaign across the globe. USSOCOM has

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<sup>20</sup> USSOCOM. *History*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> *USSOCOM Mission Statement*, online at [http://www.socom.mil/Docs/command\\_mission.pdf](http://www.socom.mil/Docs/command_mission.pdf), accessed on 4 January 2006.

become a warfighter equal to the regional combatant commands. This is a positive change because the United States is fighting against an enemy not geographically fixed by state boundaries. Al Qaida tends to hide and move in the seams between RCC's. There needs to be a lead agency that can be a global warfighter. USSOCOM never had a regional focus. It was always responsible for preparing forces for worldwide deployment, which required a global outlook. Its senior leaders must ensure that they properly configure the command to accomplish mission.

How to configure USSOCOM is a long-term question because the protracted nature of the war makes the answer elusive. The GWOT is more analogous to the struggle against communism than the war against the Germany and Japan. The views of General John Abizaid, Commander Central Command, are valuable because of his daily direction of the main theater. He believes "that the Long War is only in its early stages...Success will...be an incremental process of modernization of the Islamic world, which will only gradually find its own accommodation with the global economy and open political systems."<sup>22</sup> There will be no victory parade in New York City at the end of the GWOT. The war is generational. The Marine Corps and USSOCOM should not seek a "quick fix" because they must deal with the consequences of the decision for years. There will not be a short period of war and then a return to "how thing were always done."

## **CONCLUSION**

Whatever course of action the leaders of the Marine Corps, USSOCOM, and the Department of Defense choose needs take into account the protracted nature of the war and its global battlefield. Leaders must recognize that change is difficult for organizations and they need to manage it skillfully. The course of action needs to be feasible within the cultural differences

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<sup>22</sup> Abizaid as quoted in David Ignatius, "Achieving Real Victory Could Take Decades", *The Washington Post*, 26 December 2004, accessed online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A26054-2004Dec25.html>.

that exist between Marines and SOF. It needs to take into account the reasons for USSOCOM's founding and the sensitivity of SOF forces toward subordination and misuse by conventional commanders. Courses of action that do not consider these factors are unlikely to achieve long-term success.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE DOCTRINE AND THEORY OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS**

Now that the basis for the establishment of USSOCOM and the Marine Corps' non-participation has been explained and the cultural differences explored, the next task is to understand the current doctrine and theory of special operations. This requires a somewhat pedantic discussion of the meaning and use of terms. Doctrine consists of "fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions."<sup>23</sup> It establishes a common language and understanding for members of an organization so they can tackle complex problems with some measure of uniformity. Doctrine serves as the "box." Theory if used properly can show why the designer built the box the way he did. As Clausewitz said, it is "intended to provide a thinking man with a frame of reference."<sup>24</sup> Together doctrine and theory serve as a set of assumptions by which military units view the present and future course of events.<sup>25</sup> Both theory and doctrine should serve as a standard by which USSOCOM commanders judge any Marine Corps force contribution.

It is reasonable to assume that USSOCOM commanders have certain expectations of any force joining their organization. Marine forces that do not meet those expectations would be unwelcome and would disrupt cohesion and unity. The first assumption is that USSOCOM would expect any force contribution to be consistent with and relevant under current joint special

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<sup>23</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 1-02 DOD Dictionary of Military Terms* (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 31 August 2005), 168.

<sup>24</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 1993), 163.

<sup>25</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 1-02 DOD Dictionary of Military Terms*, 50.

operations doctrine. The second assumption is that a Marine force contribution would be equally consistent and relevant under the umbrella of special operations theory. Both assumptions are valid as long as the accepted theory and doctrine are reliable for the current war.

## **DOCTRINE AS DEFINITION**

The individual services have their own service specific doctrine for special operations. Because USSOCOM is a joint command, its leadership looks toward joint doctrine for key definitions and organizing concepts. Therefore, this paper used joint doctrine primarily and service doctrine sparingly. One of the most important functions of doctrine is to define terms. As with most points of contention, this is one, in which precise terms must be used precisely. Before the argument can be advanced any further, the definition of certain terms must be clarified.

The central question around which Marine participation in USSOCOM revolves is, “what are special operations forces?” Since USSOCOM has operational control of the services’ special operations forces, then the definition of SOF goes a long way toward determining what type of contribution the Marine Corps must make to satisfy the requirement levied on it by the Secretary of Defense. Joint Publication 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations* (JP 3-05) defines special operations forces as “Those Active and Reserve Component forces of the Military Services designated by the Secretary of Defense and specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct and support special operations. Also called SOF.”<sup>26</sup>

By that definition, the Marine Corps does not have any operational units classified as Special Operations Forces. The sole exception to this is the Marine Corps Special Operations Command Detachment (MCSOCOM Det.). In 2003, the Marine Corps stood up MCSOCOM Det. as a concept test unit. It served under the operational control USSOCOM and the tactical control of Naval Special Warfare Command. The unit consisted of a headquarters element, fires

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<sup>26</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-05 Doctrine for Joint Special Operations* (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 17 December 2003) GL-12.

element, reconnaissance element, and intelligence element with a unit strength of 87 Marines.<sup>27</sup>

MCSOCOM Det. conducted a deployment to Iraq, but its future prospects are uncertain because of the larger question of Marine Corps force contribution.

Another term used loosely is “special forces.” The Marine Corps does not have Special Forces. Joint doctrine defines Special Forces as “US Army forces organized, trained, and equipped to conduct special operations with an emphasis on unconventional warfare capabilities. Also called SF.”<sup>28</sup> If the Marine Corps has neither Special Operations Forces nor Special Forces, can it conduct “special operations” today? JP 3-05 defines special operations as:

“Operations conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to achieve military, diplomatic, informational, and or economic objectives employing military capabilities for which there is no broad conventional force requirement. These operations often require covert, clandestine, or low visibility capabilities. Special operations are applicable across the range of military operations. They can be conducted independently or in conjunction with operations of conventional forces or other government agencies and may include operations through, with, or by indigenous or surrogate forces. Special operations differ from conventional operations in degree of physical risk, operational techniques, mode of employment, independence from friendly support, and dependence on detailed operational intelligence and indigenous assets. Also called SO.”<sup>29</sup>

Based on this definition, Marine Corps forces routinely train for and conduct special operations. On 5 January 1991, a Marine rescue force flew 854 nautical miles from the Gulf of Oman to Somalia. There they secured and evacuated 250 people including the American and Soviet ambassador from the American embassy in Mogadishu, Somalia. This mission required three aerial refuelings and penetration of a hostile air space while the city devolved into civil war.<sup>30</sup> This was a special operation. The rescue of downed Air Force Captain Scott O’Grady by Marines from Serbian held Bosnia was a special operation. Marine Air Ground Task Forces (MAGTF’s) are forward deployed everyday on board naval amphibious ready groups. Together this team is responsible for direct action operations, tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel

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<sup>27</sup> John A. Van Messel, *USMC-USSOCOM Relationship: Does Increased Interoperability Necessitate Force Contribution?* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 2004), 21.

<sup>28</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-05 Doctrine for Joint Special Operations* GL-11.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Col. Jeffery A. Bowden, *Operation Eastern Exit*, Unpublished Briefing Notes, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2005.

(TRAP) in denied areas, rescue of non-combatants from foreign countries, and many other operations that fall within the definition of special operations. Depending how one defines “hostile, denied, or politically sensitive”, it is arguable that the Marine Corps has conducted special operations in one form or another since Lieutenant Presley O’Bannon went to the “shores of Tripoli” in 1805.<sup>31</sup>

This extended discussion of definitions was important because much of the debate that surrounds the current and future special operations capability within the Marine Corps is really about terms. One view is that the Marine Corps cannot conduct special operations, because it has no special operations forces. Others claim that MEU (SOC) and Force Reconnaissance are the Marine Corps’ version of Special Forces. As the joint doctrinal definitions show, none of these claims are accurate. SOF, SO, and SF are distinctly different. They are precise terms and organizational leaders should use them precisely. They are inter-related, but one is not a requirement for the other. For the issue of force contribution, the key fact is that based on the definitions above, the Marine Corps does not need to create any new units in order to conduct special operations and thus contribute to USSOCOM.

## **DOCTRINE AS JUDGEMENT CRITERIA**

As the definition of Special Operation Forces in JP 3-05 states, SOF forces are any forces that the Secretary of Defense designates so long as they specifically trained, organized and equipped to conduct or support special operations. This is broad enough that the Secretary could designate almost any unit with any capability as SOF. The joint definition sets the bar too low. Current USSOCOM units are likely to judge any Marine contribution with the suspicion that all new team members typically receive. Marine Corps leaders need to employ a higher standard

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<sup>31</sup> J. Robert Moskin, *The U. S. Marine Corps Story* (Boston: Little Brown and Company 1992), 38.

than the basic definition. JP 3-05 provides the following chart, which is instructive into the USSOCOM mindset:



Figure 1: Special Operations Forces Truths<sup>32</sup>

These four “truths” are illustrative of the way USSOCOM views itself. USSOCOM commanders and the “rank and file” are likely to judge any force contribution offered by the Marine Corps against these truths in addition to the broad definition of special operations and special operations forces. To be accepted, Marine forces need to demonstrate that they meet the standard set by these truths. A caveat is in order however. The USSOCOM force structure contains a wide range of units. Certain national special mission units are highly selective while other units are much less so. Marine forces do not need to meet the entry criteria of the most selective units to make a useful contribution to USSOCOM.

USSOCOM leaders would find little argument from Marines over the SOF truths. The Marine Corps views itself as a brotherhood of warriors first and employers of technology second. The Marine Corps has the longest entry-level training and goes to great lengths to ensure every Marine is a rifleman with mandatory infantry and martial arts training for all, regardless of job description. The Marine Corps’ special operations units, the MEU (SOC)’s train for twenty-six weeks in a focused special operations program and then go through a certification process before

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<sup>32</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-05 Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*, II-4.

deployment. Therefore, while there are cultural differences between the Marine Corps and the USSOCOM, there is agreement on the fundamental truths and approaches for preparing warriors.

## DOCTRINAL MISSIONS

Now that the joint definition of SOF is established, the next question the paper must answer is, “What does SOF do?” Decision makers can better understand USSOCOM as a joint functional command by reviewing the missions it conducts as opposed to the army or the navy which define themselves by the mediums (land or sea) in which they operate. Joint Publication 3-05 narrows the broad definition of special operations down to a series of core tasks.

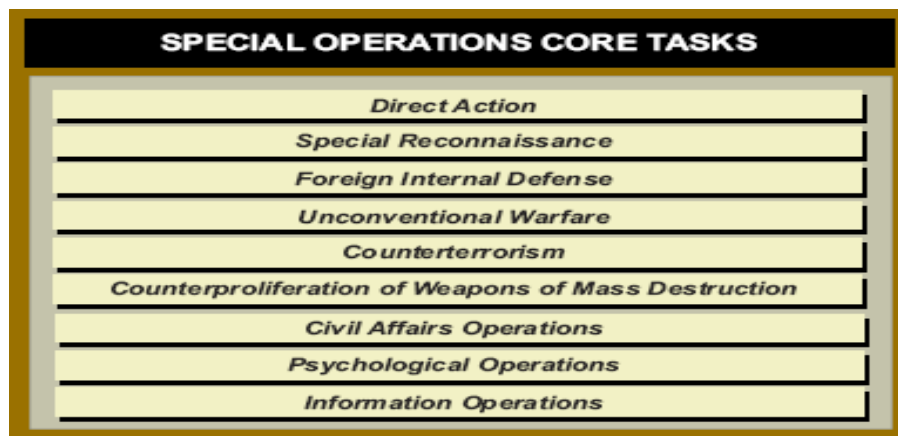


Figure 2: Special Operations Core Tasks<sup>33</sup>

The chart above is a collective task list that displays the capabilities of the entire SOF community and therefore USSOCOM in general rather than of any individual unit. Some SOF units conduct multiple tasks while others focus on a single primary mission. U. S. Army Psychological Operations forces mainly conduct psychological operations. U.S. Army Special Forces are capable across many of the SO core tasks. The key point is that a unit does not need to conduct all of these tasks for USSOCOM to consider it SOF. The main distinction within mission types is between “hard” and “soft” special operations. Hard SOF is direct action, counter-terrorism, and associated special reconnaissance. U. S. Navy Sea Air Land (SEAL)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., II-5.



Teams and U. S. Army Rangers are an example of a force optimized for “hard” special operations. Soft special operations are unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, civil affairs, information operations and other “non-kinetic” means. These operations attempt to influence a population in unconventional ways rather than through application of violence as the primary means. The U. S. Army Special Forces, while versatile, are most closely associated with unconventional warfare, or “soft special operations.” To illustrate what capabilities currently exist within USSOCOM, charts depicting each service component are located in Appendix A.

## **SPECIAL OPERATIONS THEORY**

The Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) at Hurlburt Field, Florida is the special operations community’s “institution of higher learning.” The school’s mission “is to educate Special Operations Forces executive, senior, and intermediate leaders and selected other national and international security decision-makers, both military and civilian, through teaching, research, and outreach in the science and art of Joint Special Operations.”<sup>34</sup> In addition to the resident program, JSOU sends instructors to other service colleges to teach those same topics through the outreach program directed in the mission statement. Those training teams use the same materials as the resident course, but reach a much wider audience.<sup>35</sup> JSOU bases theory instruction on William McRaven’s theory of special operations and Bard E. O’Neill’s theory of insurgency and terrorism. This paper focused on McRaven theory, because O’Neill’s is a general theory of terrorism rather than one specifically about special operations.

William H. McRaven wrote his thesis while he was a student at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. His goal was to develop a standard theory that was as widely applicable for special operations as the theories of Clausewitz and Liddel Hart are for

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<sup>34</sup> *JSOU Mission Statement*, online at <https://www.hurlburt.af.mil/jsou/>, accessed on 10 November 2005.

<sup>35</sup> School of Advanced Military Studies, Curriculum Academic Years 2004-6. Ft Leavenworth, KS.

conventional operations.<sup>36</sup> Since JSOU teaches McRaven's theory, it is the "accepted" theory of special operations within the community. Aside from the caveat that, no theory is ever accepted by everyone, McRaven's has had a wide impact on manning, training, and operations. As evidence, this monograph's author was first introduced the theory while he was a member of the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU (SOC) in 1995. The leadership of that unit used the theory extensively to test the validity of courses of action and task organization for the conduct of amphibious special operations.

McRaven is a U. S. Navy SEAL officer and former commander of SEAL Team 3. McRaven created his own definition of special operations on which to base his theory. He wrote, "A special operation is conducted by forces specially trained, equipped, and supported for a specific target whose destruction, elimination, or rescue (in the case of hostages), is a political or military imperative."<sup>37</sup> Because his definition is different from the current joint definition of special operations, it is instructive to analyze it to determine what he added, changed or omitted. McRaven included destruction, elimination, and rescue, which equate to direct action, counter terrorism, and the associated special reconnaissance. He did not include unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, civil affairs or the other soft special operations. His definition has a hard SOF perspective. This ensures that McRaven's theory is only reliable to explain success or failure of a special operation in situations that conform to his definition. Since this is the prominent theory of special operations, it is clear that a theorist or practitioner must update it if it is to remain reliable across the entire set of special operations core tasks.

According to McRaven, the key to success in a special operation is achieving relative superiority on an objective. McRaven defines relative superiority as "a condition that exists when an attacking force, generally smaller, gains a decisive advantage over a larger or well-defended

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<sup>36</sup> William H. McRaven, *The Theory of Special Operations* (Masters Thesis, Naval Post Graduate School, 1993), abstract and 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

enemy.”<sup>38</sup> This is how a small force can defeat a numerically stronger force that is often entrenched and expecting an attack. Relative superiority is the heart of his theory.

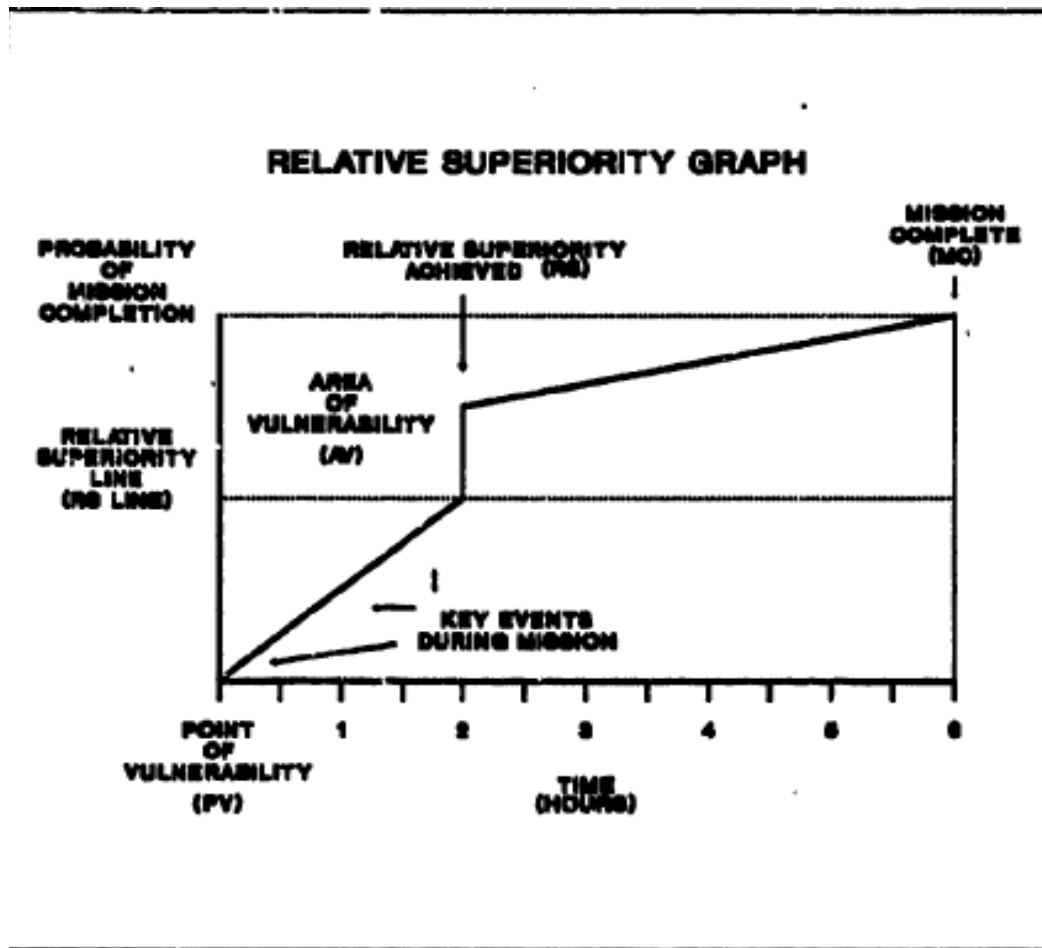


Figure 3: Sample Relative Superiority<sup>39</sup>

McRaven wrote, “It (relative superiority) must be sustained in order to guarantee victory.” At the point when relative superiority is lost, the strength of the conventional defenders begins to weigh against the attackers. The relative superiority graph (Fig. 3) is McRaven’s visual model for success or failure of a special operation. As long as the attackers gain and maintain relative superiority early (X-axis equals time), the probability of mission completion (Y-axis) by special operations forces was likely to be high. According to the theory, special operations forces

<sup>38</sup> William H McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare Theory & Practice* (Novato CA: Presidio Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>39</sup> McRaven, *The Theory of Special Operations*, 10.

gain and maintain relative superiority by applying the principles of special operations. These principles are, “simplicity, security, repetition, surprise, speed, and purpose.”<sup>40</sup> He singles out simplicity as the most important principle and the most difficult to gain. He argued that a small force could best achieve simplicity because large conventional forces essentially induce their own friction by their magnitude.

McRaven used the case study method to prove his theory. He stated that the cases used “span the entire spectrum of special operations from global conventional war to peace time engagement.”<sup>41</sup> By analyzing the German attack on Eben Emael, the British raid on Saint Nazaire, the U. S. Army’s Son Tay raid and five other similar special operations, McRaven hoped to preclude drawing the false conclusions that a small sample could produce. However, this is exactly what he did. His definition of a special operation is intentionally narrow and therefore limits the scope of the operations studied. He only wrote about special operations, which were national level missions into a hostile country for a short duration. His theory leaves the impression that all special operations are a type of long-range raid. This is not the reality since the beginning of the GWOT. Today special operations are ongoing worldwide. The United States government has deployed SOF to places as far flung as the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, the Philippines, Western Iraq, and South America. In almost every case, their operations are at variance with McRaven’s definition of a special operation.<sup>42</sup>

Special operations campaigns that tie together many individual missions distributed in time and space have largely replaced special operations as McRaven defines them. Long range, unilateral special operations missions into an enemy nation’s territory have been rare in the Global War on Terror. In the current war, SOF typically operates in countries with some measure of host government support, or at least acquiescence. In McRaven’s case studies, penetrating the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Kaplan, “Imperial Grunts” *The Atlantic*, October 2005, 84.

enemy's national defense system before and after the operation is a large part of the challenge. Today it is more important to have an extended presence in a target country so intelligence operatives can work in a semi-permissive environment. That reaction forces are mustered and ready with a combined arms capability is essential. A single command and control system that can maintain unity of command over all forces throughout the operation is required. This is the new reality.

The Global War on Terror is arguably a global counter insurgency (COIN) campaign.<sup>43</sup> The U.S. Army recently wrote and issued a counter-insurgency manual for Iraq and Afghanistan. Clearly the army regards COIN as a key component of the GWOT. Kalev Sepp, a retired U. S. Army Special Forces officer and faculty member at the Naval Postgraduate School conducted a study of "best practices" in counter insurgency. He found that when SOF focused on raiding, and "kill-capture" operations instead of unconventional warfare and civil affairs, the COIN effort suffered as a result. In Sepp's words, "failed counterinsurgencies reveal unsuccessful operational practices."<sup>44</sup> His research concludes that any theory of special operations focused specifically on direct action missions that ignores the broader aspects of special operations is bound to be out of step with the requirements of the global war on terror. Sepp's work is one more example that McRaven's theory needs modification to remain reliable.

This dose of current reality does not mean McRaven is wrong, only dated. He developed his theory in 1993, when the Fulda Gap and Desert Storm were still the epitome of warfare. He created his theory before Somalia, Bosnia, or the attacks on September 11, 2001. Today the United States is more apt to intervene in a failed or failing state than to conduct a unilateral special operation in a denied area in a war against a sovereign nation state. The former type of intervention is likely to continue to be the model as long as the United States has large troop

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<sup>43</sup> Bruce Hoffman, "Does Our Counter-Terrorism Strategy Match the Threat?" Testimony before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation on September 29, 2005 (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2005), 11.

<sup>44</sup> Kalev I. Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," *Military Review*, May-June 2005, 10.

commitments in Iraq, Afghanistan and other GWOT countries. McRaven's theory is reliable in the context in which he wrote, but it is out of step with operations since the intervention in Somalia.

For McRaven's theory to remain reliable and therefore useful, it needs an update. McRaven bases achievement of relative superiority on the principles of simplicity, security, repetition, surprise, speed and purpose. These principles remain applicable for actions on the objective during a special operation. However, as the next chapter demonstrates, success or failure of a special operation involves a wide range of actions distributed in space and time that often take place away from the objective. Special operations have evolved from missions as McRaven views them, to campaigns. Each mission is only one element in a larger context rather than a stand-alone event in which success is determined by actions on an objective.

For the theory to remain applicable during the GWOT, this monograph adds the principles of "power", "resilience", and "unity of command" to McRaven's current list. For the purpose of this work, the monograph's author created the following definitions. Power is the ability to inflict physical destruction on an alert enemy. It is the ability to fight to an objective, fight on an objective, and then fight off an objective. Furthermore, power is the ability to prevent an enemy from gaining relative superiority. Resilience is the ability of a unit to hold ground and to sustain itself in area of operations. It is the ability to receive damage from an enemy while continuing with its mission. Finally, resilience is the ability to regain relative superiority once it begins to shift to the enemy rather than assuming it is lost once the shift begins. Unity of command is the ability for the SOF commander to command all of the forces involved in an operation. Unity of command in this sense includes the SOF forces on the objective as well as those friendly reaction forces that can respond to the objective if a problem occurs.

## **CONCLUSION**

Decision makers can draw the following conclusions from this chapter's review of the doctrine and theory of special operations. First, the Marine Corps has no special operations forces today other than a small test bed unit. Though the Marine Corps has virtually no SOF forces, it has a long and distinguished history of conducting special operations. The Secretary of Defense can designate any forces that conduct or support special operations as special operations forces. The Secretary of Defense can designate existing Marine forces as SOF as long as they are specifically organized, trained and equipped to conduct special operations. Based on the joint definition of SOF, there is no need for the Marine Corps to create new forces to establish a component in USSOCOM.

The prevailing theory of special operations is out of date because of the narrowness by which McRaven defines a special operation. McRaven's theory cannot explain the success or failure of many of the special operations conducted since the beginning of the GWOT. SOF routinely conducts operations in a semi-permissive environment. They have focused much more on a blend of soft special operations, direct action, and operations in conjunction with conventional forces. If a theory fails to explain the majority of occurrences that it purports to explain, then one must question the reliability of the theory. Force structures and doctrine based on McRaven's theory of special operations need to be reviewed in light of recent SOF experience. This chapter modified McRaven's theory with additional principles that reflect SOF practices since the theory's creation. The next chapter demonstrates how these new principles expose gaps in the USSOCOM force structure that the Marine Corps can fill.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE RECENT PRACTICE OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS**

On September 11, 2001, trans-national terrorists launched the deadliest foreign attack ever in terms of human lives lost on the United States of America. The terrorists that committed this act were members of Usama Bin Ladin's Al Qaida organization. In addition to 9/11, they

were also responsible for the attacks that struck the World Trade Center in 1993 and the USS Cole in 2000. Less well known is Al Qaida's active involvement in operations against Americans in Somalia.<sup>45</sup> The Global War on Terror started in 1993, but few Americans were aware of that fact. Somalia was the first place that USSOCOM confronted Al Qaida, so that is where this chapter begins its analysis of recent special operations. The goal of the analysis in this chapter is the identification of force structure shortfalls within USSOCOM so the Marine Corp can provide a unique capability rather than a duplicate an existing one.

The case studies in this chapter, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Northern Iraq, demonstrate that USSOCOM needs a force that provides power, resilience, and unity of command for SOF commanders. This monograph uses these particular case studies for a variety of reasons. First, information for each was widely available. Much of the conduct of SOF forces is highly classified. In order for this monograph to remain unclassified and thus be available to potential readers, unclassified sources were required. Each case study was the subject of some public debate or very intense debate in the case of Somalia. The second reason to choose these particular cases was their relevance to the war against Al Qaida. This is true even in the case of Somalia, even though most Americans did not yet perceive that the nation was at war with the terrorist organization. Each case study is contemporary enough to help answer the question, what else does USSOCOM need? The last reason to choose these cases is that they differed from McRaven's definition of special operations. The fact that some operations in line with McRaven's theory may be occurring is irrelevant. The forces already exist to conduct those types of operations. USSOCOM forces have struggled and the potential payoff for a force contribution is greatest where practice and theory are mismatched.

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<sup>45</sup> Norman Friedman, *Terrorism, Afghanistan, and America's New Way of War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2003), 13; see also National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), 60.



## SOMALIA

The United States' mission in Somalia was to aid the Somali people and ease the effects of wide spread famine exacerbated by constant warfare. Warring clans and government opposition groups battled for supremacy throughout the late 1980's and into the early 1990's. One of the primary means employed by the clans to defeat their enemies was food denial. Clans tried to control the flow of food throughout the country, maximizing their own while denying the share to their rivals. This tactic put them at cross-purposes with the international relief community. In the early 1990's, non-governmental organizations attempted to increase food delivery into Somalia and conduct distribution across the country.<sup>46</sup> They met with repeated theft and violence from clan attack.



Figure 4: Somalia<sup>47</sup>

United Nations Resolution 751 authorized increased food aid and the deployment of a 550-man Pakistani peacekeeping force to ensure the food got through to the destitute Somali

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<sup>46</sup> Robert F. Bauman, Lawrence A. Yates, with the collaboration of Versalle F. Washington, *"My Clan Against the World": US and Coalition Forces in Somalia 1992-1994* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 18.

<sup>47</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook* [database on line]; at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/so.html>, accessed on 3 December 2005.

populace. The facts on the ground made that mission impossible. Years of arms shipments to Somalia had led to clan armies with thousands of heavily armed men. The Pakistani mission could not succeed unless the clans voluntarily laid down their arms or accepted the food distribution program. The clans refused to make either concession. The UN strengthened the force, but it was still unable to achieve success. The UN implemented a second Resolution, 767, calling for airlift of food supplies into Somalia. The United States mounted an operation called Provide Relief. American aircraft delivered 28,000 metric tons of food from Kenya into Somalia, but little reached the starving. Until some nation placed significant force on the ground, nothing was going to change. In December 1992, President George Bush in consultation with the UN decided that the United States would lead a multi-national force to “establish a secure environment for humanitarian relief operations in Somalia as soon as possible.”<sup>48</sup>

The expanded relief mission was designated Restore Hope. The United States Central Command designated I Marine Expeditionary Force (IMEF) as the headquarters for Joint Task Force (JTF) Somalia. JTF forces went ashore spearheaded by the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU (SOC) supported by Navy SEALs. The JTF’s mission was to re-establish sufficient security to allow humanitarian relief efforts to proceed. The Marines and SEAL’s seized Mogadishu airport then moved into the city and started to assert control throughout southern Somalia. The JTF, promptly renamed United Task Force (UNITAF), provided a sufficient show of force, which decreased the violence to a point where commanders decided to cancel the deployment of a tank battalion. However, UNITAF still possessed light armored vehicles, armored personnel carriers and attack helicopters.<sup>49</sup> A UN force, UNOSOM II replaced UNITAF when it achieved its limited mandate for security.

The new UN command was a collection of forces from over 20 countries as diverse as Norway and Nigeria. The United States maintained responsibility for the Quick Reaction Force

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<sup>48</sup> Bauman, “*My Clan Against the World*”, 25.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 66.

(QRF), manned by elements of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division. The remainder of the UNOSOM II force had much less capability than UNITAF force it replaced. Because of the number of nations involved, it also operated under a very complex chain of command. One of the mandates that UNOSOM II was required to enforce was the ability to inspect weapon's storage sites belonging to the variety of militia groups in Somalia. Mohamed Farah Aideed controlled a radio station near one of those sites, which routinely broadcast anti-UN messages. On June 5, 1993, Pakistani forces attempted to inspect a weapons storage site near the station. Fearing that the Pakistanis were moving to close the radio station militiamen loyal to Aideed attacked them. Aideed's forces took the Pakistanis by surprise and by the end of the day 23 Pakistanis were dead, 56 wounded and six captured.<sup>50</sup>

The result of Aideed's ambush of the Pakistanis was a UN Security Council resolution that authorized the arrest of those responsible for the attacks. This placed UNOSOMII forces in direct opposition to Aideed and his Somali National Army (SNA). The UN force on the ground in Somalia lacked the intelligence gathering ability and requisite forces to conduct the mission. Some senior leaders in Mogadishu requested that the United States send special operations forces to help. President Clinton approved the request and Task Force Ranger (TF Ranger) deployed to Somalia in August.

TF Ranger was composed of elements of 3-75 Ranger Battalion and national special mission units. These units were some of the best and most elite formations in the US military. The task force was mainly helicopter borne, with lightly armed and armored HMMWV's for ground mobility. The task force also lacked tanks, artillery, fighter-bombers or AC-130 gun ships for fire support. TF Ranger reported to Central Command rather than to UNOSOMII or any American component thereof. Throughout the late summer and early fall of 1993, TF Ranger staged missions from the airport in Mogadishu as they attempted to arrest Aideed and his senior

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 108.

leadership. Manhunts are notoriously difficult and task force leaders struggled to gather actionable intelligence.<sup>51</sup> TF Ranger had some small success and some embarrassments, but no solid leads towards arresting Aideded.

On October 3, 1993 the task force employing human intelligence assets, located the site of meeting attended by several of Aideded's top assistants and potentially by Aideded himself.<sup>52</sup> That afternoon the task force launched the raid made famous by Mark Bowden's book and the Hollywood movie. After an initially successful start, a Somali gunman with a rocket-propelled grenade shot down a Blackhawk helicopter. Another gunman downed a second helicopter shortly after the first one crashed. The ensuing eighteen hours were a battle to recover the crews of two downed helicopters while trying to extract the entire raid force back to the airport. 2-14 Infantry, a conventional US Army infantry battalion from the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division served as the UNOSOM II quick reaction force. When 2-14 Infantry attempted to reach the crash site, Somali militiamen blocked their path, and the battalion returned to the airfield. At 2323, they tried again, supported by a Pakistani tank company and 32 Malaysian armored personnel carriers.<sup>53</sup> The relief force reached the TF Ranger positions and on the morning of 4 October, extracted them to the stadium in the Pakistani controlled section of the city. Eighteen Americans died in the operation. The effect of the images of dead soldiers dragged through the streets on US foreign policy and world opinion is well known.<sup>54</sup>

The bravery and skill of the men of Task Force Ranger is without question. The fact that such a small force maintained cohesion and continued to fight against overwhelming numbers for as long as they did is a testament to the selection and training that went into the creation of the

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<sup>51</sup> Chadwick W. Clark, *Personnel Targeting Operations* (Ft Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2003), 2.

<sup>52</sup> Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999), 28.

<sup>53</sup> Baumann, "My Clan Against the World", 151.

<sup>54</sup> Usama Bin Laden praised the results of the battle in a 1996 fatwa claiming; the United States "left the area carrying disappointment, humiliation, defeat and your dead with you." National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002), 48.

units involved. These personal qualities did not alleviate the shortfalls that are evident however. The 3 October mission is an ideal case study to examine the way ahead for USSOCOM. While Task Force Ranger had relative superiority on the objective, the mission went well. After SNA gunmen shot down the first helicopter, the force lost relative superiority while they attempted to reach the crash site and Somali reinforcements arrived. The mission on October 3 took place in the context of a larger special operations campaign that sought to tie together a series of raids into the objective of dismantling the Somali National Army leadership. This campaign required excellent actionable intelligence. To gain it, intelligence personnel required a semi-permissive environment to gather targeting information. The mission was not a long-range unilateral operation. It was a daily intelligence hunt in an area filled with conventional forces and sustainment bases.

Task Force Ranger was light by design. It required helicopter mobility to ensure rapid response to breaking intelligence, but in hindsight, the force was far too light for the battle of 3 October. This was only partly a material issue. It was also a command and control issue. Task Force Ranger did not report to any of the conventional commanders in Mogadishu. When the task force launched on the 3 October raid, members of its staff notified the second in command of UN forces in Somalia.<sup>55</sup> This notification never reached the quick reaction force (QRF) from the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division.<sup>56</sup> The QRF commander received notification after the mission started due to the secrecy shrouding the operation. The time lag ensured that the QRF leaders did not have a plan to support Task Force Ranger until the mission was well underway and the task force was in trouble. In fairness, the TF Ranger staff did not notify the QRF because of fears about security at UN headquarters. Nevertheless, the security gained came at a steep cost in unity of

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<sup>55</sup> Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 29.

<sup>56</sup> Lawrence E. Casper, *Falcon Brigade: Combat and Command in Somalia and Haiti* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 33.

command. No force heavy enough to extract TF Ranger was ready to respond when it could not extract itself from the objective.

The physical heaviness or power of force is the second part of the issue. Relief convoys of HMMWV's repeatedly tried to reach the various strong points established by the Task Force in the city. Somalis carrying automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades beat them back each time. On the early morning of 4 October, the QRF was able to reach TF Ranger with the support of Malaysian M-113 armored personnel carriers and Pakistani M-48 tanks. Neither of these systems were state of the art in 1993. They were sufficient however to reach the stranded Americans. The lesson is obvious. Even in special operations, power matters. Heavy forces have a role on the battlefield, including the special operations battlefield. Under McRaven's theory, armor is of no use because it cannot get to the objective area. In Somalia, it saved Task Force Ranger.

Much has been made of then Defense Secretary Les Aspin's refusal to grant permission for UNOSOM to deploy American armor to Mogadishu. Even if he had approved tanks, they still would not have been available, to Task Force Ranger for the same reason that the QRF was not ready to support them. The conventional force requested them.<sup>57</sup> Task Force Ranger kept UNOSOM II forces at arm's length. The earliest that American tanks could have intervened was when the QRF first attempted to reach the task force, hours after the second helicopter crashed.

The case of Task Force Ranger illuminates a gap within the USSOCOM force structure. Special operations commanders often resist control by conventional commanders. The SOF force typically works for the theater commander instead of the local commander. This relationship frequently caused problems because two units that share the same area, but report to different commanders rarely coordinate well. If this arrangement is going to continue, then special operations commanders need their own heavy force to ensure unity of command. The special

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<sup>57</sup> Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 310.

operation commander needs a force that is strong enough to fight to an objective area through resistance, extract light SOF forces in an emergency, and then fight its way to safety. They need to be able to seize and hold terrain before and during an operation. They need a force that can create a semi-permissive bubble under which intelligence operations can occur and that is resilient enough to take punishment and continue the mission at the same time. McRaven says large forces create their own friction due to their size. The more moving parts a machine has, the more likely one is to fail. Special operations commanders do not need large friction inducing forces. They need powerful forces that can impose their will on the enemy after surprise has been lost and relative superiority has passed to the enemy.

Speed, surprise, and skill are only a substitute for power and resilience in a frictionless environment. A single national special operation repeatedly rehearsed does a great deal to reduce friction. A special operations campaign with missions initiated repeatedly on rapid planning and standard operating procedures is exposed to much more friction because surprise can be local at best. The ultimate friction creator, the enemy, has much more opportunity to influence events, and induce friction when SOF forces are operating repeatedly in the same area employing generally the same tactics.

## **AFGHANISTAN**

The attacks of September 11, 2001 serve as a contemporary parallel to the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 that brought the United States into World War II. However, instead of a foreign nation attacking US military facilities after an extended period of tension, a non-state force attacked the financial and governmental heart of the United States in order to deliver a decapitation blow. The attacks by Al Qaida were a figurative and literal bolt from the blue. While some in the government had inklings that a terrorist operation was coming, the attack stunned most of American society with its ferocity and devastation. The U. S. military was equally surprised. Afghanistan was the subject of few contingency plans that fall.

That should not have been the case. Al Qaida had been at war with the United States for some years, but it was not apparent to most Americans until September 11. The previous section documented Al Qaida's participation in Somalia. There were also connections between Bin Ladin and the first World Trade Center attack in 1993 as well as an attempt to blow up American airliners in 1995.<sup>58</sup> In 1996, Bin Laden moved his base of operations from the Sudan to Afghanistan, but kept up the pressure on the United States in Africa. On August 7, 1998, Al Qaida terrorists used vehicle bombs to attack the American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The attacks killed hundreds and wounded thousands of people.<sup>59</sup>

The United States responded by firing cruise missiles into Afghanistan and the Sudan. Terrorists are fleeting targets and terrorist camps tend to be simple with few fixed facilities suitable for missiles or bombs. The missile strikes did not have the intended effect of killing or deterring Bin Ladin from future action. Some senior leaders in the U.S. government and military debated and planned the use of special operations forces on the ground and employment of AC-130's in the air. The American military attempted neither option because of the difficulties of operating in that region and a lack of intelligence on Bin Ladin's location. Then USSOCOM commander, General Peter Schoomaker argued that USSOCOM forces could operate successfully in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. Instead of pressing the point, he deferred to the opinion of General Zinni at CENTCOM, who preferred building the counter-terrorism capabilities of neighboring countries to direct involvement. It is unknown if USSOCOM forces could have located Bin Ladin if they had been allowed to operate in Afghanistan. However, it is certain that the military means employed were insufficient to deter him from attacking again.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> National Commission, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 60.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 134-137.





Figure 5: Afghanistan<sup>61</sup>

On October 12, 2000, Al Qaida terrorists employing an explosive laden boat attacked the USS Cole in the port of Aden, Yemen. The ship remained afloat, but the attack killed 17 sailors and wounded 40 others. The National Security Council studied options for a counter-attack, but the FBI and the CIA were unable to establish evidence to the level of certainty that the Clinton administration required to authorize retaliation. America took no military action. In November, the American people elected George W. Bush president and the transition to the new administration over shadowed any plans to attack Al Qaida. On December 29, 2000, members of the CIA counter-terrorism center wrote a prescient memo. They argued that there was “no single silver bullet” solution to the problem with Al Qaida in Afghanistan. The memo also proposed “A major effort to support the Northern Alliance through intelligence sharing and increased funding so that it could stave off the Taliban army and tie down al Qaida fighters.”<sup>62</sup> The CIA understood at the time that no single operation would end the Al Qaida problem. Rooting Al Qaida out of Afghanistan required a counter-terrorism campaign nested in a larger interagency effort.

<sup>61</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook* [database on line]; at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/af.html>, accessed on 3 December, 2005.

<sup>62</sup> National Commission, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 197.

This monograph does not cover the actual events of September 11, 2001 because that day is probably the most reported event in a generation. What is relevant about the first days after the attack is President Bush's decision that only a ground invasion would be able to destroy the Al Qaida network in Afghanistan. No such plan existed in the military at the time. General Franks, Commander of Central Command said that the military "did not have an off-the-shelf plan to eliminate the Al Qaida threat in Afghanistan."<sup>63</sup> The CIA did have a plan. Proposed by director George Tenet, it was the genesis of what ultimately occurred in Afghanistan. In the CIA plan, covert teams from the intelligence agency were to enter Afghanistan to conduct intelligence gathering and to make contact with the resistance group, the Northern Alliance. These CIA teams were to then link up with SOF forces that would provide the Afghans advice and access to American aerial firepower.

The American special operators were from a variety of units, but the men who fought on horseback alongside the Northern alliance and were largely responsible for toppling the Taliban were Special Forces soldiers from Task Force Dagger. This force, based around the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, was designated Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF)-North. In October 2001, they deployed to Karshi Karnabad (K2), Uzbekistan and established a base for operations in Afghanistan. While at K2, they adopted the name "TF Dagger."<sup>64</sup> From K2, Dagger inserted Special Forces teams, throughout Afghanistan. These teams linked up with elements of the Northern Alliance and with Afghan leader Hamid Karzai and his supporters around Kandahar. Their efforts when combined with the incredible firepower that the United States delivered from the air routed the Taliban in short order revealing a hollow Taliban leadership that had little popular support.

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<sup>63</sup> National Commission, 332.

<sup>64</sup> Charles H. Briscoe and others, *Weapon of Choice: ARSOF in Afghanistan*, (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003), 75.

A separate SOF organization also operated in Afghanistan. This task force was composed of US Army Rangers and national special mission units.<sup>65</sup> This organization's mission was to kill or capture "high value targets" (HVT's). HVT's were a euphemism for Taliban and Al Qaida senior leaders, especially Usama Bin Ladin and the Taliban's leader Mullah Omar. The task force conducted a raid on Mullah Omar's compound and a nearby desert airstrip called Objective Rhino (OBJ Rhino) to capture or kill the Taliban leader. They did not accomplish either objective because he was not home when the SOF forces attacked his compound. This particular operation is worthy of further study. The special mission units staged and launched the mission from the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk.<sup>66</sup> The carrier provided the SOF forces with a launch platform in international waters that precluded the need to stage the mission from a third country which could have potentially lead to compromise or been influenced by the vagaries of international diplomacy. Another aspect of this mission was the participation of the Marine Corps.

The 15<sup>th</sup> MEU (SOC) was at sea aboard Navy shipping off the coast of Pakistan on a regularly scheduled deployment. CENTCOM directed the MEU to serve as the Quick Reaction Force for the operation against OBJ Rhino. The MEU QRF was ultimately not committed, but its Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel (TRAP) force was. During the mission, one of the SOF MH-60K helicopters crashed in Duburdin, Pakistan. The Marine TRAP force launched within 20 minutes of notification to recover the downed aircraft.<sup>67</sup> As in Somalia, the QRF and the raid force were not part of the same cohesive organization. They had not trained together and their operations together were ad-hoc in nature. This oversight did not cost the force in this instance, but that was a matter of luck rather than planning. If the Rangers had required reinforcement and the Marines came to their aid, they would have had to conduct a night linkup

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<sup>65</sup> Tommy Franks, *American Soldier* (New York: Regan Books, 2004), 303.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>67</sup> Major J. M. January, *TF-58 Developing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warfighting Concepts*, MMS Thesis (Quantico VA: Command and Staff College, 2003), 16.

in contact on unfamiliar terrain. This would not have been the ideal situation for two units to establish a working relationship.

In October 2001, the Coalition Forces Maritime Component Commander (CFMCC) Vice Admiral Moore ordered the Marines to conduct amphibious raids into Afghanistan. He formed TF-58 to meet this requirement. The task force was a combined Navy/Marine organization built around two MEU (SOC)'s, the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup> and their associated amphibious shipping. Each MEU (SOC) was at sea in the Indian Ocean. A command element from the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade took command of the organization. The TF-58 commander, Brigadier General Mattis made the decision to make the aviation component, the force's main effort.<sup>68</sup> All Marine Air Ground Task Forces have an aviation combat element (ACE). The ACE is rarely the main effort. General Mattis wanted to seize a forward operating base in Afghanistan and then use the ACE to attack throughout the country.

TF-58 ultimately seized Forward Operating Base Rhino (FOB Rhino), the same site the Rangers raided earlier. This site was nearly 400 miles from amphibious shipping and hundreds of miles inside Afghanistan. The difference between the Rangers and the Marines was that the Marines had the combat power to seize terrain vice merely conduct a raid. TF-58 had the logistics, firepower, and ability to hold terrain that allowed it to penetrate deep in Taliban territory and establish a lodgment. Once there, TF-58 could sustain itself and attack outward. From FOB Rhino, TF- 58 participated in the seizure of Kandahar, the Taliban capital, with Army Special Forces. From Kandahar and FOB Rhino, the Marines operated with every special operations force in Afghanistan. They conducted TRAP and QRF missions. They were involved in sensitive site exploitations of terrorist compounds. The aviation and combat service support elements provided support to the non-Marine forces ashore in Afghanistan.<sup>69</sup> When a thousand

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<sup>68</sup> January, *TF-58 Developing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warfighting Concepts*, 19.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

Marines arrived from the sea to within miles of the Taliban capital, the entire dynamic in Afghanistan changed.

When Al Qaida elements fled to the mountains around Tora Bora, Task Force-58 leaders conducted planning in preparation for operations in that region. They intended to surround and destroy the fleeing enemy. Ultimately, CENTCOM employed SOF forces and local fighters rather than the Marines in Tora Bora. The only Marine involvement was support provided by the aviation combat element. While the reasoning had to do with minimizing American casualties in what would appear to be a tough infantry fight, the decision not to employ the MEU's on the ground was a costly one. One participant in the battle said, "We did not have the fire and maneuver available to us to get in there and root guys out."<sup>70</sup> Al Qaida elements and possibly Bin Ladin himself escaped from the mountain stronghold.

Elements of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (Air Assault) replaced TF-58 in early 2002. The Third Brigade Combat Team, better known as the Rakkasans, came into Afghanistan and took over the role of theater heavy force. A "force cap" from Central Command severely restricted the size of the brigade. The Rakkasans could not bring along their artillery, had their number of attack helicopters limited to eight, and were only able to deploy one of their three infantry battalions.<sup>71</sup> Central Command allowed a second battalion from the 101st to deploy to Pakistan and one battalion from the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain division to go K2 in Uzbekistan.

The Rakkasans participated in Operation Anaconda in 2002 with Army Special forces that were already in Afghanistan. The operation was a combined SOF, indigenous and conventional force mission designed to destroy a pocket of Al Qaida along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The Rakkasans air assaulted by helicopter into blocking positions in the Shahikot Valley while Army Special Forces and Afghan fighters attempted to drive the Al Qaida

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<sup>70</sup> Sean Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda* (New York: Berkley Books, 2005), 20.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 53.

force toward them. During the operation, Al Qaida fighters shot down a helicopter carrying a SOF reconnaissance team. This event, much like in Somalia, became the focus of the operation and overshadowed everything else. Like Mogadishu, those on the ground during Operation Anaconda demonstrated extraordinary bravery and resourcefulness. The greatest breakdowns occurred within the ad-hoc command and control organizations that lacked unity of command and were unsuited for the task they faced.<sup>72</sup>

Operations in Afghanistan reinforce many of the conclusions from Somalia. SOF was again involved in an extended campaign rather than in a single special operation. To be successful, the campaign required forces to go into Afghanistan and gather intelligence, apply firepower, and sustain themselves. One of the reasons that the Special Forces campaign to collapse the Taliban was successful because the forces involved expected and prepared for an extended campaign. The special mission to capture Mullah Omar failed because he was not at the target location and there was no provision for follow-on operations.

Special Operations in Afghanistan required a heavy force. CENTCOM sent the Marines into the country because power and resilience matter even in a largely special operations campaign. The Marines provided this capability around FOB Rhino and Kandahar. The Rakkasans provided a similar capability during Operation Anaconda. Both times the SOF, heavy force mix was an ad hoc organization that had little experience working together. They succeeded by luck and bravery rather than by correct command and control arrangements and good staff work. It is only by luck that the Marines were not required to conduct a link up with the Rangers at Objective Rhino. The lack of unity was terribly evident in the planning and conduct of Operation Anaconda.

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<sup>72</sup> For a detailed analysis of the command and control failures during Anaconda see, Mark G. Davis, *Operation Anaconda: Command and Confusion in Joint Warfare* Thesis (Maxwell AFB: School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2004); see Naylor for a more personal view of the battle from the perspective of the participants.

Once ashore, the Marines were heavy enough to sustain themselves and attack towards the Kandahar area. The Rakkasans were not heavy enough for their role. Again, during Operation Anaconda as in Somalia, a light infantry force that derived its mobility primarily from helicopters ran into trouble when air defenses were stronger than anticipated. TF-58 on the other hand was able to deploy and sustain armor and strike aircraft from a mobile sea base. These forces overmatched any resistance they met while in Afghanistan and were never in a perilous position even in the early phases of the campaign. The strength of the Marines in Afghanistan came from three sources. They were aboard amphibious shipping off the coast of Pakistan so they were available for immediate use. They were special operations capable forces so they were able to adapt quickly to and integrate within an environment dominated by SOF forces. Years of training and standard operating procedures, such as the rapid response planning process enabled the MEU's to integrate seamlessly with special mission units, launching a TRAP mission with 20 minutes notice. Lastly, the MAGTF with its aviation and combat service support elements provided operational reach for senior commanders and tactical sustainment for itself and other units in a completely austere environment.

## **NORTHERN IRAQ**

Special Operations Forces played the primary role during the initial phases of the campaign in Afghanistan. Some argue that Operation Enduring Freedom was an unusual event in military history and therefore an exception rather than an enduring example. The invasion of Iraq followed quickly on the heels of operations in Afghanistan. The role of special operations forces in Iraq while not necessarily traditional was a supporting effort for the conventional forces that were the main effort during the drive from Kuwait to Baghdad. Therefore, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) may serve as a more broadly representative case study than the previous two for the employment of SOF forces.

CENTCOM employed SOF throughout Iraq during the first phases of OIF. A special operations task force operated in the western desert to ensure Iraq did not fire Scud missiles at Israel. Prohibiting such an event reduced the possibility of Israeli intervention into the conflict. Naval Special Warfare units seized oil platforms in the Northern Arabian Gulf to prevent the Iraqi government from sabotaging their oil resources or polluting the Gulf. Army Special Forces operated throughout the Marine and Army zones. They organized local forces, conducted reconnaissance and direct action missions while the heavy forces drove to Baghdad. Additionally special mission units hunted high value targets such as regime leaders and known terrorists. The most radical portion of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the one most germane to discussion of USSOCOM force structure changes are the operations that took place in Northern Iraq.



Figure 6: Northern Iraq<sup>73</sup>

As has been widely reported, Turkey did not let the United States invade Iraq from its territory. This decision prevented a conventional attack by the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division from Turkey into Northern Iraq. Instead of a conventional ground attack, CENTCOM assigned Joint Special

<sup>73</sup> COL Gregory Fontenot, LTC E. J. Degen, and LTC David Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 252.



Operations Task Force North (JSOTF-N) the responsibility of tying down Iraqi forces north of Baghdad. JSOTF-N based around the 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group had the mission to “conduct unconventional warfare and other special operations in JSOA North to disrupt Iraqi combat power, IOT [in order to] prevent effective military operations against CFLCC forces.”<sup>74</sup>

JSOTF-N initially had three Special Forces battalions and one Army infantry battalion along with civil affairs, psychological operations and support units in its task organization.<sup>75</sup> Early in the planning for OIF, when Central Command intended that the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division would attack into Northern Iraq, they determined that 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade would be subordinate to that division during operations.<sup>76</sup> When the Turkish government denied access to their country, the plan shifted to an operation led entirely by JSOTF-N rather than one that envisaged a shared battle space with the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. CENTCOM determined at that point, to subordinate the airborne brigade to JSOTF-N. This was an unpopular decision with of many of the brigade’s leaders. Some of those leaders believed that it was improper for one Colonel to control the actions of another. Others worried that the JSOTF’s span of control would be too great to accomplish its mission along a 300-kilometer front, command the forces already assigned to the JSOTF and control the airborne brigade. The debate over command and control continued until the eve of the war. Finally, the Coalition Forces Special Operations Component Commander sent his deputy commander, a Brigadier General, in with the force to command both the JSOTF and the airborne brigade.<sup>77</sup> This decision resolved the issue, but hard feelings persisted within the command elements throughout the operation because tactical control (TACON) of the airborne brigade remained with the JSOTF.

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<sup>74</sup> Task Force Viking *Operation Iraqi Freedom* Unclassified Briefing

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Stephen P. Wilkins, *Integration of Army Special Operations Forces and Conventional Forces in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom: Considerations for Future Operations*. (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army Special Operations Command Futures Center, 2005), 37.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 37-39.

On March 22, 2003, the units of JSOTF-N flew into Northern Iraq and linked up with indigenous Kurdish forces. The JSOTF-N main effort was the employment of Special Forces Teams with Kurdish militia groups. Together they attacked the Ansar Al Islam terrorist camp to eliminate that threat to their rear. To facilitate the attack to Baghdad, JSOTF-N employed large amounts of air power to fix Iraqi forces serving in the North thus ensuring that the Iraqis could not reinforce the fight in the south. While the operation was ongoing, the commander in the north ordered the movement of the 173<sup>rd</sup> into the area of operations. The brigade parachuted onto the airfield at Bashir, which was north of the “Green Line” that separated Kurdish and Iraqi controlled territory.

The JSOTF-N commander wanted the 173<sup>rd</sup> to move up to the Green Line. “The brigade commander did not want to move forward without the “full package” of combat support and combat service support forces.”<sup>78</sup> The 173<sup>rd</sup> expected the arrival of a medium ready company (MRC) and heavy ready company (HRC) from Europe. These two units contained tanks and mechanized vehicles that were highly valued by brigade leaders. The 173<sup>rd</sup> wanted to wait until the MRC and HRC completed their deployment into Iraq by air. When the Iraqi defense of Kirkuk collapsed, the 173<sup>rd</sup> moved to and captured the oilfield and the airfield outside of the city. The deployment of MRC and the HRC consumed large amounts of airlift and slowed the tempo of operations in the north. Most disappointing was the maintenance problems that plagued the unit and kept it from making an impact on the operation.<sup>79</sup> These delays created a perception of inactivity by the airborne brigade that further exacerbated an already poor relationship with JSOTF-N.

When Iraqi defenses collapsed around the country, it became easy to capture Iraqi cities but difficult to establish control in them. The size of the American force in the north made it difficult to secure the cities when they fell. This was the case in Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 47.

Mosul was home to a large Sunni Arab population and a popular retirement location for Iraqi army officers. The potential for insurgency in Mosul was high. Knowing that he needed more forces, the JSOTF-N commander requested support from the 26<sup>th</sup> MEU (SOC) which was already forward deployed aboard amphibious shipping in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>80</sup>

Marines from the 26<sup>th</sup> MEU (SOC) flew into Irbil on Marine Corps' C-130s. The JSOTF commander offered the MEU commander a rest period for the Marines before they moved forward. When the MEU commander realized the urgency of the situation he demonstrated typical Marine fighting spirit and declared, "We didn't come here to sleep."<sup>81</sup> The MEU moved immediately to Mosul and conducted stability and security operations in support of the JSOTF. Initial elements of the MEU received logistics support from the JSOTF. Later the 26 MEU (SOC) supported itself via its own aircraft, which flew to and from naval shipping. Marine fires also added to the equation in the north. The MEU brought its own helicopters and strike aircraft and provided a vital link to more joint fires.

The war in Northern Iraq was a sequence of battles distributed in time and space. It was a special operations campaign. As in Afghanistan, a MEU (SOC) was able to respond with little notice and integrate itself into a complex situation dominated by special operations forces. Again, unity of command was a factor. The SOF commander did not have a previously established working relationship with the airborne brigade. When assigned TACON, their relationship was tense and required a senior officer to mediate. The special operations training and expeditionary orientation of the MEU allowed it to integrate seamlessly into this environment.

The resilience and power of the MEU were again vital additions to a special operations campaign. SOF commanders needed a force that could respond quickly, sustain itself, and secure a large area of battle space. It is important to note that it was not in the plan to employ the MEU

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 48.

in this role. The need for a MEU “like” capability emerged as the campaign progressed. In the words of a study done for the United States Army Special Operations Command, “The Marines effectively took direction from a SOF headquarters and made a substantial contribution at a key point in JSOTF-North’s campaign in northern Iraq.”<sup>82</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This chapter tested a modified theory of special operations against recent case studies. From this test, requirements for the future USSOCOM force structure became clear. Each case study demonstrated that SOF commanders risked mission failure when they did not have unity of command over all the forces involved in their mission. Additionally these forces needed to possess power and resilience. Today commanders employ SOF units in campaigns distributed in time and space. Even the famous TF Ranger raid re-enacted in the movie *Blackhawk Down* was one operation amidst a broader campaign. As demonstrated in Somalia, Afghanistan and Northern Iraq, to fight in these campaigns SOF forces needed a heavy force close by that could sustain itself, seize terrain and employ firepower. Today no such force exists in USSOCOM. That force is even more useful if it has special operations training and an expeditionary mindset. Conventional Army airborne forces do not have the organic firepower or sustainment to fill this role. The clash of conventional Army and SOF cultures created roadblocks to integration in each case study. When Joint commanders employed MAGTF’s in this role, no such friction was evident. However, each attempt was part of an ad-hoc organization created quickly to fill an emerging need. Each time, all sides would have benefited if the Marines’ role had been integral to the special operations task force to begin with, rather than as a last minute addition.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: MEU (SOF) & MARSOC**

USSOCOM needs a force with the MEU (SOC)'s capabilities. USSOCOM also needs a campaign capable headquarters to practice operational art within a special operations campaign. Analysis of history, theory and doctrine makes this demonstrably clear. If USSOCOM needs more SEAL's, Special Forces soldiers, or Rangers, then it ought to go to the services that provide those forces and seek more. The United States Marine Corps should not create a force that duplicates what already exists and is anathema to its organizational culture. If the Marine Corps must provide a component to USSOCOM then it should provide a capability that is distinctly, "Marine." The Department of Defense and USSOCOM should not view the Marine Corps merely as a source of labor. The Marine Corps can and should provide a unique capability that can revolutionize the way special operations forces operate and increase USSOCOM organizational capability for the current war.

The Marine Corps should offer, and USSOCOM should accept placement of all deployed MEU (SOC)'s under the operational control of the theater SOC commander. In the GWOT, the MEU (SOC) is the ideal force to provide the power, resilience, and ensure the unity of command for the SOC commander of all forces involved in a special operation. The addition of this capability would allow USSOCOM to transition to campaign capable force structure instead of remaining a force oriented on success in individual special operations.

### **POWER**

As stated in chapter two, for the purpose of this monograph, power is the ability to inflict physical destruction on an alert enemy. It is the ability to fight to an objective, fight on an objective, and then fight off an objective. Furthermore, power is the ability to prevent an enemy from gaining relative superiority. Each case study demonstrated that SOF commanders need a unit with this type of capability. Of all current special operations capable forces, only the MEU (SOC) possesses this ability. The Ranger Regiment is the nearest equivalent, but it is too light to

confront most heavily armed enemies in sustained close combat without significant augmentation.

This was true in Mogadishu and remains true today.

COMMAND ELEMENT (CE)	GROUND COMBAT ELEMENT (GCE)	AVIATION COMBAT ELEMENT (ACE)	MEU SERVICE SUPPORT GROUP (MSSG)
MEU (SOC) command and control is provided by the Command Element.	The GCE is structured around a reinforced infantry battalion.	The ACE is a composite helicopter squadron	The MSSG provides the following:
Approximately 169 personnel: USMC: 25 OFF and 140 ENL USN: 1 OFF and 3 ENL	Approx. 1200 personnel: USMC: 59 OFF and 1086 ENL USN: 3 OFF and 50 ENL	Approx. 417 personnel: USMC 75 OFF and 337 ENL USN: 1 OFF and 4 ENL	Approximately 275 personnel: USMC: 15 OFF and 235 ENL USN: 3 OFF and 22 ENL
MEU(SOC) Commander and Staff	H&S Company	Medium Helicopter Squadron Det.	Headquarters and Service Platoon
Force Reconnaissance Det.	Rifle Company x 3	Heavy Helicopter Squadron Det.	Communications Det.
Force Imagery Interpreter Unit Det.	Weapons Company	Light Attack Helicopter Squadron Det.	Maintenance Det.
Interrogator Translator Team	Tank Platoon	Marine Attack Squadron Det.	Supply Det.
Topographic Platoon Det.	Artillery Battery	Marine Aerial Refueler/Transport Squadron Det.	Landing Support Battalion Det.
Radio Battalion Det.	LAR Platoon/Company	Marine Air Control Group Det.	Medical/Dental Det.
Communications Battalion Det.	Shore Fire Control Party	Marine Wing Support Squadron Det.	Engineer Support Battalion Det.
Universal Spotter Det.	Combat Engineer Platoon	Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron Det.	Motor Transport Battalion Det.
	Reconnaissance Platoon		
	Assault Amphibian Vehicle Platoon		
	Scout Sniper Platoon		

Figure 7: MEU (SOC) Structure and Organization<sup>83</sup>

The power of the MEU (SOC) comes from its unique task organization. As with all MAGTF's it has a command element, a ground combat element, an aviation combat element and a combat service support element, which in the case of the MEU (SOC) is called the MEU Service Support Group (MSSG). The MEU (SOC) is a combined arms force serving under one commander, consisting of tanks, strike aircraft, light armored vehicles, artillery, helicopters, engineers and all the other specialties listed in the table above. Before departing the United States, the force embarks aboard amphibious shipping. The MEU's larger fixed wing aircraft,

<sup>83</sup> Department of the Navy, United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Order 3120.9B W/CH 1 Policy for Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU (SOC))*, (Washington DC 25 Sept 01), Enclosure 1.

such as the C-130's, self deploy to airfields overseas. The ships then forward deploy close to potential trouble spots. Typically, there is one MEU (SOC) in the European Command, Pacific Command, and Central Command area of operations. MEU's are trained and ready for immediate response to contingencies on short notice because they are already forward.

For the Marine Corps to certify a MEU "special operations capable", it directs that each conduct a standardized 26-week predeployment training program. The goal of that training is to provide the national leadership and the Regional Combatant Commander's with the "following four core capabilities: Amphibious Operations, designated Maritime Special Operations, Military Operations Other than War, and supporting operations to include the introduction of follow on forces."<sup>84</sup> To achieve this, the elements of the MEU conduct a very rigorous series of training events and schools with a large percentage of the time spent at sea. To become special operations capable, the Marines spend much of their time learning special skills like assault climbing, specialized demolitions, urban sniping, clandestine reconnaissance and surveillance, and low level flying in built up areas. The MEU (SOC) command element spends most of its training time learning to employ the Rapid Response Planning Process. This is a military decision making tool which allows commanders to start the execution of an operation 6 hours after receipt of notification to do so.

During the conduct of operations, the MEU (SOC) combines armored firepower and artillery for the close fight with strike aircraft and helicopters for the deep battle. The entire force can project itself hundreds of miles into enemy territory as in the case of Afghanistan, or form a protective bubble around SOF forces in the case of Mogadishu. A MEU (SOC) under the operational control of the theater SOC commander is a force that can fight to other lighter SOF units in trouble, defeat enemy reserves that may begin to tip the balance of relative superiority, or

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<sup>84</sup> Department of the Navy, United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Order 3502.3A Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) Predeployment Training Program (MEU (SOC) PTP)*., (Washington DC 10 Jan 01), 2.

forcibly extract the SOF force when relative superiority has been lost. As the case studies make clear, USSOCOM does not have, but SOF commanders routinely need and request units with this capability.

## RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability of a unit to hold ground and to sustain itself in an area of operations. It is the ability to receive damage from an enemy while continuing with its mission. Finally, resilience is the ability to regain relative superiority once it begins to shift to the enemy rather than assuming it is lost once the shift begins. SOF forces required, but did not organically possess this capability in Mogadishu, Afghanistan, or in Northern Iraq. The MEU (SOC) is a resilient organization in large measure because of its robust logistical capability.

The MEU Service Support Group (MSSG) is the organization's logistics provider and coordinator. The MEU (SOC)'s combat elements provide the aspect of power that can fight in conjunction with other SOF forces. The aviation combat element can project that power deep into the enemy's rear as in Afghanistan and the embassy rescue in Mogadishu. However, what makes the MEU truly unique among units that conduct special operations is the ability to hold terrain and sustain itself. The MSSG can provide the entire MEU with 15 days of most classes of supply.<sup>85</sup> Because of this, except for the supply items themselves, the MEU (SOC) is essentially a self-contained force. It can make its own water, draw fuels from storage tanks aboard amphibious ships and then download it onto CH-53 helicopters or its own C-130 aircraft for further distribution to vehicles. It can create forward arming and refueling points far from the sea for its own forces or for other SOF units. It can seize and begin operations in ports and airfields to allow other forces to enter a theater.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> The MSSG stocks and provides supply classes I, II, IIIB, V, VIII, IX.

<sup>86</sup> Department of the Navy, United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Order 3120.9B W/CH 1 Policy for Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU (SOC))*, (Washington DC 25 Sept 01), 13-14.



Because it is self-contained, a MEU (SOC) can stay in an objective area or an area of operations long after other forces would need reinforcement or augmentation. It can provide the protective bubble needed to conduct effective counter insurgency operations or to support a series of high value target raids. Not only can it stay in an area, it can also take punishment and continue to fight. If SOF forces were required to secure a vital facility, a MEU (SOC) could fight a conventional battle around national special mission units to ensure they could continue their work unmolested. If a MEU (SOC) had been available in Mogadishu, it could have provided the tanks and armored vehicles needed as well as AV-8B Harrier strike aircraft, 155mm artillery as well as engineers and a wide variety of other capabilities to TF Ranger. With advanced equipment and highly trained Marines, SOF commanders would not have had to turn to another nation's forces with obsolete equipment to assist them in a time of crisis.

## **UNITY OF COMMAND**

SOF commanders can use the power and resilience of the MEU (SOC) to improve SOF capability, but they need unity of command to revolutionize special operations. In each case study, SOF commanders required a heavy force to complement their light SOF forces. Each time the heavy force joined the SOF team in an ad-hoc way. Sometimes it worked well, as in the case of TF-58 in Afghanistan and sometimes it worked poorly as in the case of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade in Northern Iraq. The common denominator in each case was that unity of command was missing. The SOF commander needed to train, plan, and rehearse with the heavy force before execution. That was not possible in any of the case studies due the chain of command and the task organization of the forces involved.

The creation of Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) can change this. The MARSOC should have the typical service responsibilities of training and equipping forces. It should also have an operational responsibility to serve as a Joint Special Operations Task Force capable of conducting a SOF campaign in a specific county or region. This would require a two

or three star headquarters depending on the contingency that would answer to the Commander of USSOCOM and would serve the role of joint task force commander for “small wars.” Joint commanders could employ the JSOTF in a major contingency in which the preponderance of forces employed was SOF. The headquarters would have operational control of all forces in its area of responsibility regardless of source. This would allow the theater SOC commander to focus on the entire theater and the USSOCOM commander to focus on its global responsibilities. It would free the Special Forces Groups, a tactical organization, from the responsibility of serving as a JSOTF. Joint command requires a focus on operational level rarely resident at a tactical headquarters.

The MARSOC JSOTF would focus on operational art in the conduct of small wars rather than the prosecution of specific national special missions or conventional operations. It would be a SOF command and thus serve as a bridge to SOF forces. The headquarters would also be a Marine command thus serving the same role for Marines. This would bridge the culture gaps between Marines, SOF, and army conventional forces. The JSOTF headquarters would elevate the focus of SOF forces from missions to campaigns. It would link a series of tactical special missions in a particular country to the national strategic goals.

The MEU (SOC)’s themselves would be commanded and controlled differently under this scenario than they are currently. Today a MEU (SOC) serves under the control of its parent Marine Expeditionary Force until it deploys. Then, the MEU typically serves under the direction theater naval component commander or becomes the regional combatant commander’s strategic reserve. Under the new MARSOC component, the Marine Corps would permanently assign the MEU Command Element to MARSOC. The subordinate elements of the MEU would fall under the operational control (OPCON) of MARSOC during pre-deployment training. Upon deployment, the entire MEU would transfer OPCON to the theater SOC commander until committed by the regional combatant commander. From there, they could serve under the tactical control of whichever commander the RCC designates. When the MEU returned to the United

States and de-established, its headquarters would remain OPCON to MARSOC and the subordinate units would return to the control of their parent Marine Corps commands.

Under this arrangement, USSOCOM via MARSOC would control the MEU (SOC) headquarters, which maintains the special operations resident knowledge and specialized equipment. The Marine Corps operating forces would retain control of the majority of the forces in the MEU until they entered the special operations pre-deployment training program, which arguably would be better, administered by USSOCOM because of its subject matter expertise. The theater or national SOC commander would control the deployed force. This is a gain for USSOCOM and no change for the Marine Corps since the naval component commander, not the Marine Corps, typically controls the deployed MEU (SOC)'s now. Control by the naval component commander is a relic of the original amphibious doctrine of the 1930's when naval commanders employed Marines to seize advanced bases. Special operations commanders would have greater opportunity to employ Marine forces to seize advanced bases in the GWOT due to USSOCOM's central role in war planning. This would allow for more frequent employment of MEU (SOC)'s and ultimately enhance the prestige of the Marine Corps.

## **CURRENT INITIATIVES**

The initiatives proposed in this monograph are different from what the Marine Corps and USSOCOM have created today. As designed, MARSOC consists of a Foreign Military Training Unit (FMTU), two special operations battalions serving in direct action role and the associated training groups, support units and headquarters. The FMTU is a new capability in the Marine Corps, but one with precedence in the institution's experience in the 20th century's "small wars." FMTU's focus is training foreign militaries so they are able to police they own countries and prevent them from becoming failed states or havens for Al Qaida and associated terrorists. The

special operations battalions would replace the current Maritime Special Purpose Force (MSPF) that serves as an element of each deployed MEU (SOC).<sup>87</sup>

Both units would provide valuable capability to USSOCOM, but they duplicate rather than compliment or revolutionize the way USSOCOM can operate. FMTU appears to have essentially the same foreign internal defense mission that the Army Special Forces currently have. The special operations battalions would add more personnel capable of conducting direction action to a force that is already full of direct action specialists. If the Marine Corps and USSOCOM concur that these are valuable contributions then they should go forward with their development. There is potential with the special operations battalions to tap into the resources of the MEU because they would replace the MSPF as previously noted. If they continue to deploy with the MEU (SOC)'s but remain under the OPCON of USSOCOM, then USSOCOM may get the capability of the rest of the MEU by default. However, this may create the same ad-hoc relationships that existed before or worse. Under this arrangement, a potential conflict over elements of a deployed MEU (SOC) exists. Decision makers should consider the current MARSOC initiative as step one of a work in progress rather than a finished product.

## **CONCLUSION**

The GWOT and the DOD have thrust change on the Marine Corps and USSOCOM. Because the Secretary of Defense mandated that the Marine Corps must create a component in USSOCOM, the window for revolutionary change is open. USSOCOM's doctrine, theory, and force structure reflect a bias toward special missions and away from special operations. Analysis of recent history showed that vision to be dated. When this monograph modified special operations theory to reflect conduct of special operations campaigns during the GWOT, gaps and associated opportunities became evident. In war time gaps are weaknesses. Friendly forces can

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<sup>87</sup> Fred L. Schultz, "MarSOC: Just Call Them Marines." *Proceedings*, January 2006, 48-50.

fill them and make them surfaces or enemy forces can exploit them and turn them into ruptures. The opportunity to create a revolutionary capability in USSOCOM exists today with forces that exist today for a war that is ongoing today. For the Marine Corps, the opportunity to extend the utility of the MEU (SOC) well into the future exists. Because of its capabilities, it would quickly become a coveted asset for SOF commanders to employ in unexplored ways. The changes proposed are not without hurdles. They would require changes in orders, regulations and potentially in the laws that govern assignment of forces to USSOCOM. None of these hurdles is insurmountable and the potential payoff is a significantly more capable force.

## **AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The goal of this monograph has been find an answer to the question, “What kind of contribution should the Marine Corps make to USSOCOM?” In the course of research, reading and writing, the author identified more questions than can be answered here. Some areas for future research are: What is operational art in terms of a SOF campaign? Can a SOF headquarters serve in the role of joint task force headquarters in an operation that includes both SOF and conventional forces? What is the proper role and relationship for SOF and conventional forces in a global counter-insurgency? What is the proper relationship between the United States Marine Corps and United States Navy in the GWOT?

## APPENDIX A

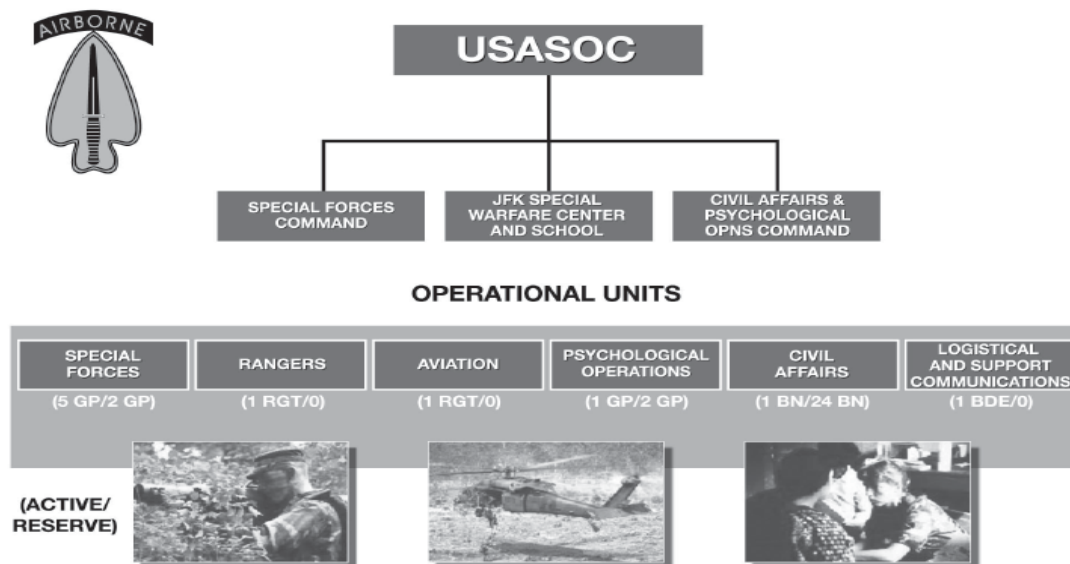


Figure 7: Army Special Operations Command<sup>88</sup>

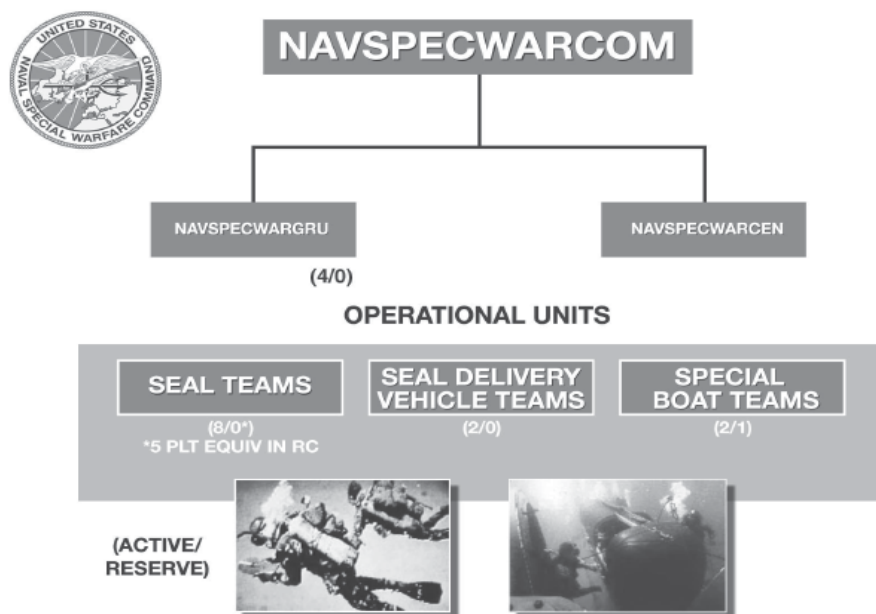


Figure 8: Naval Special Warfare Command<sup>89</sup>

<sup>88</sup> United States Special Operations Command, *Posture Statement 2003* (MacDill AFB: USSOCOM-HO July 2003), 14.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 19.

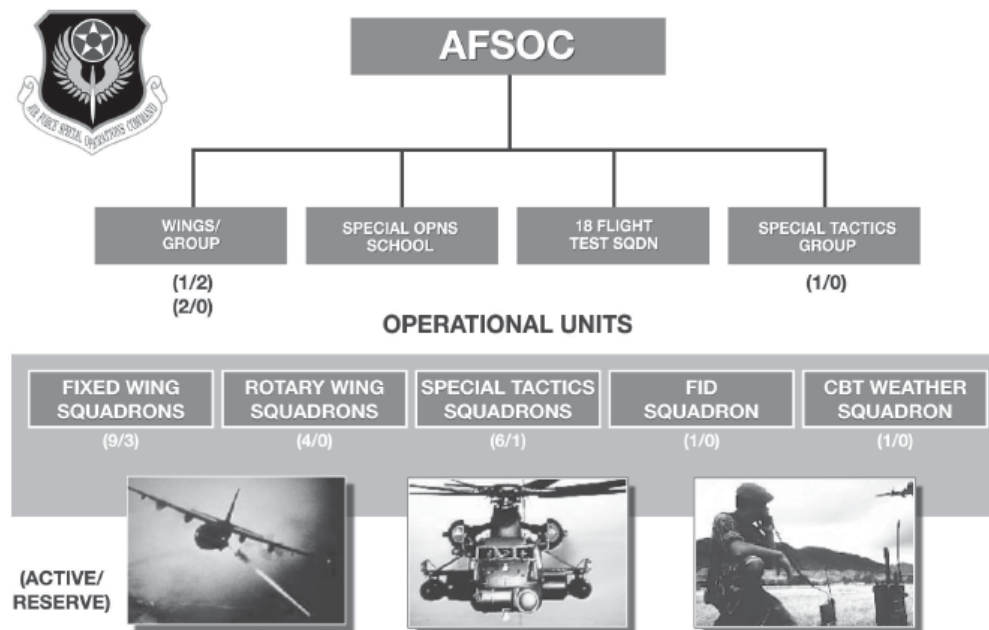


Figure 9: Air Force Special Operations Command<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 23.

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